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FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION: DANIEL BUTTS PLEADS GUILTY TO THE AGGRAVATED MURDER OF RAINIER POLICE CHIEF RALPH PAINTER

March 26, 2019

Today, Columbia County District Attorney Jeff Auxier announced that Daniel Butts pleaded guilty to one count of Aggravated Murder and two counts of Attempted Aggravated Murder for intentionally causing the death of Rainier Police Chief Ralph Painter and intentionally attempting to kill former Clatskanie Police Chief Marvin Hoover and a civilian witness on January 5, 2011 in St. Helens, Oregon.

The Columbia County District Attorney's Office consulted with and regularly updated the family of Chief Painter and the lead detectives about the pretrial discussions. Upon conclusion of the discussions, the Painter family asked Mr. Auxier to accept this offer to settle the case, which was made by the defense. The lead detectives and the Rainier Police Department are also in full support of this carefully negotiated resolution, which results in Mr. Butts receiving a life sentence in prison.

According to the plea agreement, Mr. Butts is not eligible for early release. Furthermore, he will only be qualified to apply for parole, which must then be approved, if he reaches the age of 70. Mr. Butts also pleaded Guilty Except for Insanity to lesser property offenses, including charges of Robbery in the First Degree, Burglary in the First degree and Theft in the First Degree. Mr. Butts will be in the custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC), but will serve his sentence at the Oregon State Hospital until he is deemed fit to be transferred to a DOC prison facility.

"This plea agreement acknowledges that there is substantial evidence that Daniel Butts does in fact suffer from a mental illness, but that his mental illness was never an excuse for the killing of Chief Ralph Painter," said Columbia County District Attorney Jeff Auxier. "Chief Painter acted heroically that day, and there are no excuses for the defendant's violent act."

"From this day forward I choose to forget the continuing and prolonged reminders of upcoming court hearings. I choose to forget how Ralph died. I choose to only remember how he lived," said Amy Painter, the widow of Chief Painter, in her statement to the court.

"This resolution will hopefully begin some of the healing process for me and others," said Jeremy Howell, son of Chief Painter and a veteran St. Helens Police Officer, in his statement.

"This is a win for our city, and the Rainier community supports the Painter family's decision," said Rainier Mayor Jerry Cole, who has served as mayor and as a local firefighter over 18 years. "This sentence protects our community from harm, and allows our community to heal."

The Columbia County District Attorney's Office has a strict policy against making plea offers in homicide cases. However, when a person charged with a homicide, through their attorney, makes an offer to resolve a case, the District Attorney has an obligation to present that offer to the victim's family. In this matter, the state presented the settlement offer to the Painter family. After several weeks of discussions with the family and their attorney, law enforcement, and the court, Chief Painter's family unanimously asked the District Attorney's Office to accept the pretrial offer presented by the defense.

Members of the media with additional questions may contact Columbia County District Attorney Jeff Auxier at (503) 397-0300.

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